

Two conferences on Barth's theology planned for summer 1996

Two conferences dealing with the theology of Karl Barth have been scheduled back-to-back in June, 1996, one in the East and the other in the Upper Midwest:

"The Ethics of Difference— Gender, Family, Race" Barth Conference set for June 20-21 in Philadelphia

"The Ethics of Difference: Gender, Family, and Race in Barth's Theology" is the theme of a Karl Barth Society conference to be held June 20-21, 1996, at Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia.

Speakers will be Trevor Hart (St. Andrews), Elouise Renich Fraser (Eastern Seminary), and Noel Leo Erskine (Candler School of Theology). The conference will run from noon Thursday, June 20, to noon Friday, June 21.

Registration begins at noon on Thursday, followed by Prof. Hart's paper at 2:00. Prof. Renich Fraser will speak at 4:00. After a reception and dinner, there will be a roundtable discussion with the speakers from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Prof. Erskine will speak at 8:30 Friday morning, and a panel discussion with six panelists will follow from 10:00 to noon.

Further information is available from Scott Rodin at Eastern Seminary, telephone (610) 645-9361.

"The Necessary 'No!' and the Indispensable 'Yes!'" St. Paul Barth Conference to be held June 22-24

"The Necessary 'No!' and the Indispensable 'Yes!'"—Theological Controversy, Christology, and the Mission of the Church Today" is the theme of a conference to be held June 22-24, 1996, at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. This is the seventh biennial conference on the theology of Karl Barth sponsored by the Institute for Mission in the U.S.A. of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Speakers include noted Barth scholars George Hunsinger, Bruce McCormack, Katherine Sonderegger, and John Webster, as well as Lutheran theologians Gerhard Forde, Lois Malcolm, Thelma McGill-Cobbler, and David Yeago.

The entire KBSNA constituency (not just Lutherans!) is invited to attend.

Further details are contained in the brochure included with this issue of the Newsletter. If your copy is missing or if you would like additional information, contact Wayne Stumme, Institute Director, whose office is at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, 2199 East Main Street, Columbus, Ohio 43209-2334; telephone (614) 235-4136, ext. 77.

NOTE: There has been one change since the brochure was printed. The hotel has changed the **cut-off date for room reservations to May 22** (rather than June 7 as stated in the brochure). *Availability of rooms cannot be guaranteed after May 22.*

Calvin-Barth discussion on Internet

An internet group entitled CALVIN_BARTH has been established to discuss the life, work, and influence of John Calvin and Karl Barth, and to converse about theological issues raised by their work.

Philip Butin, a Presbyterian minister in Albuquerque, N.M., and author of *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship*

MEMBERSHIP IN THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY

Readers of the Newsletter (and anyone else who is interested) are invited to join the Karl Barth Society of North America.

To become a member of the Barth Society, send your name, address, and annual dues of \$10.00 to:

Professor Russell Palmer
Dept. of Philosophy and Religion
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Omaha, NE 68182-0265

Members whose dues were last paid prior to March 1995 are urged to send in their annual renewal.

(Oxford, 1995), has been coordinating a meeting on "Calvin and Barth: Learning from Two Reformed Doctors" on PresbyNet, the online conferencing network of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

He has asked the Newsletter to announce that this discussion has now been opened to the scholarly community via the internet. "Current members of the meeting have a particular interest in involving new members with technical academic competence in the study of Calvin and/or Barth," he explains.

Dan Griswold, graduate student at SMU who is also a member of KBSNA, is handling the technical side of the operation. Those interested in receiving postings should contact him at:

dgriswol@post.smu.edu

The entire KBSNA constituency is invited to participate.

To contribute to the meeting, comments may be sent to the following internet address:

calvin_barth@post.smu.edu

Presentations by Soulen, Rogers, McCormack

Barth Society program held at 1995 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Philadelphia

In Philadelphia last November, for the seventh year in a row, the Karl Barth Society sponsored a program just prior to the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. Two sessions were held, one on Friday afternoon, November 17, and the second on Saturday morning, November 18. Both sessions were crowded.

Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel

At the November 17 session, R. Kendall Soulen (Wesley Theological Seminary) made a presentation on "Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel." Soulen criticized the "supersessionism" in Barth's doctrine of Israel. There are, he suggested, three kinds of supersessionism in traditional Christian thought:

- *Economic* supersessionism is the view that, in the economy of salvation, God's covenant with Israel is ordained from the start to be fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ, after which Israel becomes theologically obsolete.

- *Punitive* supersessionism is the view that God rejects and punishes Israel. The covenant with Israel is abrogated on account of Israel's rejection of the gospel, and Israel is punished for its unbelief.

- *Structural* supersessionism is the Christian tendency to render the Hebrew Scriptures largely

indecisive for shaping doctrinal conclusions about God's relations with the creation. Christian theology, in other words, exhibits an "Israel forgetfulness."

Karl Barth repudiates the second and third types of supersessionism in the name of Christology, but leaves us with what Soulen considers the most pernicious form of economic supersessionism. For Barth, Israel's mission has run its course, and should now be taken up into the church. Therefore, Israel's continuing existence after Christ is a function of its disobedience.

Soulen believes that, in order to overcome supersessionism, theology needs to reopen the question faced by Irenaeus in the struggle with Gnosticism: how does the church's bipartite canon (Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament) hang together as a narrative and theological unity?

Readers interested in the full development of Soulen's argument will soon be able to consult his book, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, which is scheduled for publication in May by Fortress Press.

Barth and Thomas in Convergence on Romans 1?

The second speaker at the November 17 session was Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (University of Virginia), who answered in the affirmative the question posed by the title of his paper: "Barth and Thomas in Convergence on Romans 1?" He suggested that there is indeed a convergence where Barthians and Thomists would least expect it—on the natural knowledge of God.

For Aquinas, the natural knowledge of God is not yet faith, but can be taken up into faith—by grace. Rogers holds that the usual Protestant understanding of the Thomistic duality of "nature and grace" rests on a misreading of Thomas. There is no "pure" nature that is neither ungraced nor unfallen. Nature is always already shot through with grace.

Comparing their respective expositions of the first chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans, Rogers argued that Barth could not disapprove of what Thomas says about the natural knowledge of God in his Romans commentary. Unfortunately, according to Rogers, Barth always read Thomas in the light of Vatican I.

This paper will appear this year in the journal *Modern Theology* (edited by L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley; published by Blackwell). Rogers is also the author of *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology

An overflow crowd assembled for the Saturday morning session on November 18, featuring a discussion with Bruce L. McCormack (Princeton

Theological Seminary) of his recent book *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

McCormack had originally presented a summary of his interpretation in a paper on "The von Balthasar Thesis and the Myth of the Neo-orthodox Barth" at the 1994 meeting. Now that members have had an opportunity to read his book, he was invited to return for a wide-ranging conversation.

He reiterated his contention that (*contra* von Balthasar *et al.*) the Göttingen Dogmatics (1924) already embody the basic theological decisions (*Grundentscheidungen*) that set the overall shape and movement of the whole project and make the later developments possible.

McCormack emphasized that, for Barth, God's revelation is always indirect, never directly "given." The "veiling" and "unveiling" Barth speaks of are simultaneous, not sequential. Revelation is never simply a *given*—that would *really* be a "positivism of revelation"—because Barth is always a dialectical theologian.

In that connection, McCormack was asked to explain Bonhoeffer's famous remark about Barth's alleged "positivism of revelation." The context of that, he said, was Bonhoeffer's reaction to Barth's treatment of the doctrine of the Virgin birth. Bonhoeffer objected to what struck him as a "here it is—take it or leave it" attitude toward such doctrines. It was that attitude that Bonhoeffer was referring to as "revelation positivism." As a matter of fact, however, the *dialectical* character of Barth's theology results in a very *undogmatic* dogmatics! Everything is negotiable, subject to a fresh hearing of the Word of God.

It should be remembered, McCormack pointed out, that for Barth there is no center to Christian dogmatics, if that center is a doctrine. Christology is not the center of Christian theology—Jesus Christ is!

Another point of interest in the discussion was "the Schleiermacher connection"—the question of Barth's relation to his great predecessor. McCormack thinks the historiography of 19th century theology needs to be rewritten. He sees Barth standing in the tradition of Schleiermacher and seeking to overcome its weaknesses from within. Certainly they had very different methods, but on the material questions of dogmatics they are often quite close. (He thinks the book *Beyond the Impasse* fails to make this distinction.)

As an aside, he commented that Barth's theology "came completely off the rails" in its later doctrine of the sacraments, a development that was "all Markus's fault." He suggested that it would be possible to have a quite different doctrine of the sacraments (like Calvin's) on Barthian soil.

Asked about the importance of Barth's book on Anselm, McCormack denied that Barth discovered a new theological method in studying Anselm, because his basic method is already up and running in the Göttingen Dogmatics. At most, his study of Anselm gave Barth a moment of insight into what he had already been doing. And the Anselm book is not an adequate guide to Barth's method.

Despite his criticism of "the von Balthasar thesis" as an account of Barth's development, McCormack identified Balthasar as one of his three theological heroes in this century. He sees Balthasar making some material elaborations he wishes Barth had made (Editor's note: cf. George Hunsinger's use of von Balthasar in his paper at the 1995 Elmhurst conference, reported in the Fall 1995 issue of the Newsletter). McCormack's other 20th century hero is T. F. Torrance (especially his work on the Trinity, rather than his interest in physics).

The Society's thanks are due to Walter Lowe (Emory University) for arranging such a strong program.

NOTE: Again this year, the Barth Society will present a program in conjunction with the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting. The dates for the 1996 Annual Meeting in New Orleans are November 23-26, so the KBS sessions will be held Friday afternoon, November 22, and Saturday morning, November 23. Further details will be announced in the Fall 1996 issue of the Newsletter.

John Webster's book on Barth's ethics published

Cambridge University Press has just published *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* by John Webster, the Ramsay Armitage Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto.

According to Webster, one of the most serious obstacles to a proper appreciation of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is an inadequate grasp of the fact that it is a work of moral theology as well as of systematics. A failure to take this point seriously often lies behind criticism of Barth's theology generally, when it is accused of being abstracted from the world of human action. Webster's book, the first substantial study of the last parts of the doctrine of reconciliation, clarifies Barth's thinking about humanity and human agency in a way that undermines a good deal of such criticism.

In the next issue we plan to feature a double review by Paul Matheny of Webster's book together with another recent book on Barth's ethics: *The Hastening That Waits* by Nigel Biggar (Oxford).

BARTH-KITTEL

CORRESPONDENCE

Editor's note: One of the most appreciated features of this Newsletter since its inception has been a series of translations of material pertaining to Barth studies that is not well known and/or not available in English. These translations are contributed by Paul D. Matheny (Dr.Theol., Heidelberg) who is currently Pastor of Westhampton Christian Church in Roanoke, Virginia. In this issue we feature another installment of the correspondence between Karl Barth and Gerhard Kittel (best known as editor of the *Theological Dictionary of the NT*). An earlier exchange appeared in the September 1991 issue.

Kittel's response to Barth's Letter of 12th June 1934

Translator's note: These excerpts are a direct continuation of a translation that appeared in this newsletter not long ago. The theological exchange of letters between Karl Barth and Gerhard Kittel is one of the most revealing documents of the time when the Church Struggle raged in Germany. It was precipitated by the chance meeting of Barth and Kittel in Berlin and the recent publication of the 12 Principles declared by Nazi theologians and pastors at Württemberg on May 11, 1934. Kittel is defending himself as a supporter of the German-Christian movement (Deutsche Christen). This letter has been translated not to provide material for assessing the character of Kittel's involvement with and commitment to the DC, but to give its readers a taste of the battle. Here one can almost feel the tension and sense the significance of every theological position.

Tübingen 15 June 1934

Dear Honorable Colleague,

I officially addressed the men of the Council of the Brethren in this manner, for the sole reason that they made the Barmen Declaration public by signing their names to it. Obviously my question is directed at its members, since the Council spoke for the Confessing Synod. Just as it is directed at anyone in whose names the 138 members of the synod speak. Concerning the 12 principles of Württemberg, you claim that "this thought arose first now and not perhaps a year earlier" among us. I must warn you against making such a statement. How would you know and assess what I and others in my circle thought and did in the previous 13 months that lie behind us?

But these are sidelines in comparison to the decisive question that divides us. I declare again today, just as I did to you on the 23rd of January in Berlin: it is good that God forces us, so sharply and

clearly, to see this question! I was the one who on that day shouted to the Brethren of the Emergency Committee and the Bishops: what purpose does all church-political discussion and action serve, if we do not have the courage to determine up front, if we are not both grounded in the community of the faith. I am also of the opinion that we cannot and may not, on this decisive point, give in or make concessions: neither you nor I. For whether we hurt each other is not the issue, but rather only whether we obey God and help each other and our church to find the right path. And therefore I may not be silent, when I see that you yourself and perhaps the entire Confessing Synod distorts the question which the New Testament asks and necessarily asks.

The New Testament knows of the one "epiphany"¹ (I use this term, the one around which the talk in Berlin revolved. I use it because in the vocabulary of the New Testament it is clearer than the term "apocalypsis."²) This term expresses what you mean by the dogmatic term "revelation." Whoever talks of "epiphany" or of the "epiphanies" in any other way than of Christ, is guilty according to the New Testament of being a member of the Emperor cult or of being an idol worshiper. The Bible acknowledges also the "erga theou,"³ i.e. the activity of the living God—"of the active Lord of history"—and it not only permits the faithful, but rather demands from them, that they inquire into and speak of these. There is—humanly speaking—nothing so small (even if it is the wound on the small finger of my child, or the tiredness or hunger of the disciples Mk 6:31) and there is—again humanly speaking—nothing so large (and if it is the light and death of a nation) that I cannot see "God's finger," God's hand, that means God's activity in every piece of history, in every piece of the life of an individual, in every arena of a nation's life. I may do this freely only on the ground of one single reason: on the basis of Christ, the *Epiphanes*. Therefore the category of a "sowohl-als-auch" has nothing, but nothing to do with this biblical relationship to Epiphany and *ergon thou*. When one stands by Christ, then one knows of nothing else, nothing in the entire world—not the starling on the roof or the lily in the field, not Israelite-Jewish salvation history "under the law," nor Palestinian Zealots or the Roman Emperor, not Mussolini or Hitler—upon which the "almighty creator of heaven and earth," who reveals himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, does not exercise his Lordship.

I will never allow anyone in the world to accuse me of not standing by the complete joyous fullness of the biblical message; just as I will not permit anyone to abbreviate this message for me, my church, and my nation.

However, Herr colleague, I must ask you two questions: first who gives you the right to say to me that I make the "historical moment" into a "second

that I make the "historical moment" into a "second source of revelation," or to be "second object of revelation"; from the standpoint of the New Testament: I spoke, when I attribute "God's activity" to these historical events, or to a second epiphany? Demonstrate this to me, and I will yield and allow you to call me a heretic! . . .

[Translator's note: Kittel continues his letter, making several more points. We continue near the end of the letter as he begins to ask for greater understanding from Barth. The tenor of this section is fascinating to me. Kittel's liberal theological heritage comes to the fore, as well as his respect for Barth and his life work. He is seeking to defend himself theologically! He hopes to make the case for his integrity.]

Now I ask you, Herr colleague, that you declare precisely and clearly, what you mean by your struggle against us.

Is it your intention to warn us, because we have gone down a dangerous path? Certainly, I am aware that we are all going towards destruction! And I know very well, that a German Christianity is not better than a Hellenistic or a Jewish one, nor better than a Christianity sunk to blessing the culture of the 19th century. I did not learn this just this year, but rather, if the men under whom I studied to be a theologian taught me anything invaluable, then it was that "theology is theology of revelation or it ceases to be theology" (this is the phrase that my teacher Ludwig Ihmels used to describe the guiding principles of his life work in 1909 for his Anniversary Lecture at the University of Leipzig). If you are the one who must warn us so that we are not led astray, as so many are, then I myself will freely listen to you as the voice of a brother who has been stationed along the way by God, even if the warning is sometimes uncomfortable and disturbing.

If you intend to remind me of how many foolish and false things are being said, of how many errors and false teachings are being bandied about and will be attached to us; or if you intend to remind me also, that my formulations are not clear and complete enough: then I will think this over. However I would like to say the following. In the same way as I refrain from making a caricature of you out of the theological nonsense which some of your friends and students spout, so you should refrain from making use of the untheological and half-theological (and often pseudo-theological) chatter and inarticulate banter of the many German Christians to caricature what is important to us. And further: your own life's work in a decade and a half is proof, that you do not claim to be "finished" and to have the final solution. In these years, when the struggle concerning you and your theology raged, I have often attempted to plow through to the actual point of your course and to take it seriously and to learn from you, and to ignore much that appeared questionable concerning your theology

and your exegesis. I must ask, have you really attempted to take seriously what burns in us; to listen at its deepest roots to the distorted and erring ecclesial activity and talk of these past years: and asked if here an authentic and valid course before God is not attempting to break through at some point. Have you considered that it would be both our concerns to help it gain form and character in obedience to the Gospel.

Could it be that in the last instance it is your opinion that you need to tell me that I have turned from the narrow path? If so I ask you, as I did in Berlin and as I did above in this letter—in the presence of the living God: in which of my statements or words or in which of my actions have I made the Swastika into the Epiphany? have I fallen away from the one God, the Father, and from the one Lord, Jesus Christ?

If your conflict with us arises from the fact that you yourself—perhaps without knowing it or willing it—on this point, concerning which I am seeking clarity, abbreviate the whole New Testament message, instead of defending it against its despisers, then I must reject your accusation. Then, Herr colleague, you are the one who wants to erect a self-created and molded idol in the church. Then I must be the one who says no to your idol. And even if all theologians and all Confessing Synods of the world were to stand against me, I would not stop promoting the biblical message of the entire Christ and his entire glory. Here indeed the matter must be resolved at all costs, and there can be no compromise and no concession—any more than there can be compromises or concessions with those who want to make National Socialism into an epiphany, or want out of the blood to make idols, or want to make an exercise field of lies and violence of the church of the Reformation. And even if I stand so earnestly in the battle against these other church destroying errors, so may I not be silent for tactical reasons; when one falls into error by trying to avoid another. It would mean sinning, it would mean ignoring the theological (not church-political) task which God has given me, if I were to be inactive, when the danger looms, that the wagons of the church might be shoved from one false track onto another. Then I would be the one who warns and swears, and the one who must determine whether the scriptural and confessional stance of the church has been abandoned, when one does not listen to him.

¹"The appearance (i.e. of Christ)"; cf. 1 Tim 6:14, 2 Tim 6:14, 2 Tim 1:10, etc. "Epiphany" = "the appearance (of God)" was in ancient times the epithet of Lords, which commanded that they should be worshipped as God (i.e. Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria).

² = "Revelation"; cf. 1 Cor 14:26, 2 Cor 12:7, Gal 2:2, etc.

³ = "The works of God."

Barth's Collected Works in need of financial support

The project of publishing the collected works of Karl Barth is in need of additional funding in order to continue. John Webster has forwarded the following letter he received from Professor Eberhard Jüngel in Tübingen, appealing for funds for the continued support of the *Gesamtausgabe*:

Als einen derjenigen Theologen jenseits des Atlantiks, die zu den Kennern und Interpreten des Werkes von Karl Barth gehören, erlaube ich mir, Sie mit einer Bitte zu konfrontieren, die den *Nachlaß von Karl Barth* betrifft.

Sie werden mit mir die Überzeugung teilen, daß das Werk Barths nicht nur zu den umfangreichsten, sondern auch ergiebigsten und herausragendsten Leistungen der Theologie dieses Jahrhunderts gehört. Aus dieser Überzeugung heraus hat ein Kreis von Freunden und Schülern Barths bald nach dessen Tod damit begonnen, mit der Erschließung und Herausgabe des Nachlasses die theologische, geistige und persönliche Entwicklung dieses großen Theologen zu dokumentieren. Die bisher edierten Bände der Gesamtausgabe Barths zeigen eindrucklich die Auseinandersetzungen Barths mit den geistigen und politischen Entwicklungen dieses Jahrhunderts und demonstrieren den großen Reichtum von Barths theologischem Denken. Sie dokumentieren nicht nur das persönliche Werden Barths, sondern auch ein Stück Zeit- und Theologiegeschichte.

Die weitere Herausgabe von Barths Nachlaß ist nun aus finanziellen Gründen gefährdet. Soll diese Aufgabe fortgesetzt werden können, so muß eine neue finanzielle Basis gefunden werden. Aus diesem Grund wende ich mich an Sie in Namen der Karl-Barth-Stiftung, um Sie um Rat und um Mithilfe zu bitten. Neben einer finanziellen Unterstützung durch deutsche und Schweizer Institutionen, die hoffentlich weiterhin einen Teil der Kosten für die Verwaltung und Herausgabe des Nachlasses übernehmen werden, bedarf es zusätzlicher finanzieller Mittel von Spendern, die die Theologie Karl Barths gefördert sehen möchten.

Meine Bitte an Sie besteht nun darin, die Karl-Barth-Stiftung bei dem Bemühen zu unterstützen, auch in Ihrem Land Möglichkeiten für ein "fund raising" zur Unterstützung der Herausgabe des Barth'schen Nachlasses zu finden. Können Sie der

Karl-Barth-Stiftung mögliche Spender, seien es Institutionen oder Individuen, vermitteln?

Eine Unterstützung könnte in mehrfacher Weise geschehen: als eine kontinuierliche monatliche Spende, als eine einmalige Spende zum Aufbau eines Stiftungsvermögens, oder auch als Sponsor eines speziellen Projekts, also der Herausgabe eines besonderen Bandes der Gesamtausgabe Barths.

Ihr hoffe nun, daß ich Sie mit diesem Anliegen nicht zu sehr belästigt habe. Auf jeden Fall bin ich für Ihren Rat sehr dankbar, und gerne stehe ich Ihnen auch für Rückfragen zur Verfügung.

We thank Prof. Webster for passing this letter along for the information of readers of this Newsletter. John says he would be very happy to act as an intermediary if institutions or individuals want to help. His address is: 5 Hoskin Avenue, Toronto, Canada M5S 1H7. Telephone (416) 979-2870.

Materials for the Newsletter are always welcome. Please send comments, brief articles, news items, reviews or book notices, etc., to the Editor:

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Upcoming events:

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| June 20-21 | "The Ethics of Difference"
Barth conference
Eastern Seminary, Philadelphia |
| June 22-24 | "The Necessary 'No!' and
the Indispensable 'Yes!'"
Barth conference
Luther Seminary, St. Paul |
| Nov. 22-23 | Barth Society Program at AAR/SBL
New Orleans |